

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

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AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

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FOL RPT MOSCOW 19710 ACTION SECSTATE INFO LENINGRAD TEL
AVIV 17 DEC QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 19710

TEL AVIV FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJECT: ROY MEDVEDEV ON BREZHNEV

1. SUMMARY. ROY MEDVEDEV COMMENTED DEC 17 THAT BREZHNEV IS
UNIQUE EXAMPLE IN SOVIET HISTORY OF MAN TOTALLY WITHOUT
CHARACTERISTICS WHO REACHED THE TOP AND THEN DEVELOPED A
DISTINCT POLITICAL PERSONALITY. PROCESS WAS DRAWN OUT AND
ONLY RECENTLY COMPLETED: BREZHNEV HAD NOT BEEN MOTOR IN
KHRUSHCHEV OUSTER, HAD HAD INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA
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FORCED ON HIM BY SHELEST' AND OTHERS LIKE HIM, AND HAD BEEN
FORCED TO APPEAL TO GRECHKO IN SPRING 1970. NOW, HOWEVER, HE
IS LEADERSHIP'S ONLY LIBERAL. HE WISHES TO MANAGE SYSTEM
WITHOUT SHOCKS, SO LIBERALISM HAS NO IDEOLOGICAL BASIS, BUT
IT IS GENUINE IN PRACTICE, AND IF "CZECHOSLOVAKIA SITUATION"
Arose in Eastern Europe today there would be no invasion.

WE OFFER COMMENTS AS SOVIETS COUNTERPOINT TO BIRTHDAY WAVE
OF OFFICIAL ADULATION. END SUMMARY.

2. ROY MEDVEDEV'S COMMENTS ON BREZHNEV, IN COURSE OF
FUNCTION HOSTED BY AMERICAN EXCHANGE VISITOR AND
ATTENDED BY ACTING POL COUNS AND AAFATT DEC 16, MAY
PROVIDE INTERESTING SOVIET COUNTERPOINT TO CURRENT
SURGE OF OFFICIAL ADULATION FOR LEONID IL'ICH'S 70TH
BIRTHDAY DEC 19. MEDVEDEV SAID HE IS FINISHING AN
ARTICLE ON BREZHNEV'S CAREER.

3. THE MYSTERY AND THE PROBLEM, SAID MEDVEDEV, IS HOW
A MAN TOTALLY WITHOUT PERSONALITY COULD REACH THE TOP
IN THE SOVIET POLITICAL SYSTEM, AND THEN DEVELOP A
POLITICAL PERSONALITY OF HIS OWN. THE CASE OF BREZHNEV
HAD NO PARALLEL IN SOVIET HISTORY. STALIN CERTAINLY,
AND KHRUSHCHEV TOO, HAD HAD DISTINCT PROFILES BEFORE
THEY REACHED THE TOP. KHRUSHCHEV IN MOSCOW MAY HAVE
LOOKED LIKE A CREATURE OF KAGANOVICH, BUT IN THE
UKRAINE HE HAD BEEN HIS OWN MAN, EVEN THOUGH UNDER
STALIN'S WITH TRAITS, FEATURES, DISTINCT FROM OTHERS
AND REPRESENTING SOMETHING. THIS HAD NOT BEEN THE
CASE WITH BREZHNEV. HE HAD BEEN THE INVISIBLE MAN,
WITHOUT CHARACTERISTICS, REPRESENTING NOTHING. IT WAS
A TEMPTATION TO SAY HE HAD ADVANCED PRECISELY BECAUSE
OF THIS NULLITY, AND HAD BEEN CHOSEN FOR SUCCESSIVELY
HIGHER POSTS BECAUSE HE THEREFORE THREATENED NO ONE.
HE WAS NOT EVEN ANYBODY'S MAN--MEDVEDEV DENIED
BREZHNEV HAD BEEN KHRUSHCHEV'S MAN BEFORE HE HAD
TURNED ON HIS BENEFACITOR--AND THIS WAS UNUSUAL IN THE
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FEUDALIZED SOVIET SYSTEM.

4. SINCE BREZHNEV HAS BEEN IN POWER, MEDVEDEV WENT
ON, HE HAS DEVELOPED A PERSONALITY, AND NOW REPRESENTS
SOMETHING. THIS DEVELOPMENT PROCEEDED SLOWLY, AND
HAS ONLY BEEN COMPLETED FAIRLY RECENTLY. IT HAD BEEN
SHELEPIN AND SUSLOV BETWEEN THEM WHO HAD ENGINEERED
THE OUSTER OF KHRUSHCHEV IN 1964; BREZHNEV HIMSELF HAD
NOT HAD A MAJOR ROLE. IN 1968, HE HAD NOT WANTED THE
INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA, WHICH HAD BEEN FOISTED ON
HIM AND OTHERS WHO WERE ALSO AGAINST IT BY THOSE WHO
REMAINED IN MOSCOW, HEADED BY SHELEST, WHILE THE
REST WENT ON VACATION AFTER CERN. SIMILARLY, HIS
POSITION AND PERSONALITY HAD NOT BEEN SECURE WHEN HE
HAD GONE TO MINSK IN THE SPRING OF 1970 TO OBTAIN
GRECHKO'S SUPPORT AGAINST SHELEPIN AND THE OTHERS
TRYING TO OUST HIM. (GRECHKO, LIKE ALL THE REST OF
THE SOVIET MILITARY LEADERS, WAS MOVED BY PURELY

PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN HE INTERVENED IN POLITICS; THERE WAS NO "IDEOLOGICAL" BASIS FOR THE SUPPORT HE GAVE, NO MORE THAN THERE HAD BEEN FOR THE MILITARY LEADERS WHO HAD SUPPORTED KHRUSHCHEV: THEY HAD MERELY HATED BERIA.)

5. NOW, MEDVEDEV CONCLUDED, BREZHNEV DID IN FACT HAVE A PERSONALITY, AND A POLICY. IF A SITUATION SIMILAR TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA AROSE IN EASTERN EUROPE NOW, THERE WOULD BE NO INVASION, BECAUSE HE WOULD BE AGAINST IT. ASKED WHO WAS "LIBERAL" AMONG SOVIET LEADERS, MEDVEDEV SAID "BREZHNEV, AND HE IS THE ONLY ONE." HE IS LIBERAL BECAUSE HE WANTS QUIET, NO BOTHER, NO SHOCKS, NO SHARP TURNS, MERELY SEDATE MANAGEMENT OF THE SYSTEM AND ENJOYMENT OF HIS OWN POWER POSITION. HIS "LIBERALISM" WAS THEREFORE NO MORE IDEOLOGICAL THAN THE POSITIONS OF ANY OF THE OTHER LEADERS, BUT IT WAS LIBERAL IN ITS EFFECTS.
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6. WITHOUT BEING OPTIMISTIC, MEDVEDEV NOTED, IT WAS STILL POSSIBLE TO SEE IN BREZHNEV THE EXAMPLE OF A MAN WHO CHANGED, AND GREW, LATE IN LIFE, ONCE HE HAD REACHED THE TOP.

MATLOCK

UNQUOTE ROBINSON

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